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Back on the Track and Highballing

Derailed temporarily (as were most hobbies) by the advent of mass television watching in the early 1950s, model railroading is back on the track in a big way.

There are now about 150,000 model railroaders in the United States, and hard as it may be to believe, they spend an average of \$276 a year on the hobby, says Model Railroader magazine. This makes for a current annual market of more than \$41 million and keeps the wheels humming for some 110 domestic suppliers of model railroading equipment.

The old cartoon showing a little kid complaining to mother that dad won't let him play with the train set he got for Christmas is not so far-fetched.

The average age of the model railroader is about 33.2 years, the magazine learned in a survey. His average income is nearly \$13,000 and he spends about 10 hours a week actively engaged in the hobby.

Yet there is no generation gap here. Usually more than one person in a home is interested in model railroading, and usually it is father and son.

The first model trains appeared around the turn of the century. Early ones were made by hand, and since household electricity was not in wide use in those days, each car was powered by a tiny battery-operated motor. Tracks were thin strips of metal inserted into wooden rails. The first accessory was a manually operated switch.

Santa Claus has good news for sentimentalists. The Lionel name, the most famous name in model railroading, has been revived by a new company after an absence of a number of years when the original company went out of business.

Full-scale railroads may have fallen on evil days, but in the world of the miniature, all the signals are green and it's "Highball it!" all the way.